

**THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE,  
THE NATURAL MORAL LAW, AND  
CONSERVATIVE METAPHYSICAL NATURALISM**

**Arnold T. Guminski**

This essay, augmented with endnotes, is a somewhat expanded version of a lecture presented at the University of Colorado Theology Forum on 6 April 2004. Added matter and changes (other than the essentially trivial) are within brackets. [Paper updated as of November 2004.]

Arnold T. Guminski received his B.A. degree from the University of Buffalo in 1952 and his J. D. degree from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1956. After his admission to the State Bar of California, he served six years of active duty with the United States Army. From 1963 to 1993, he was a deputy district attorney for Los Angeles County, California, for the most part specializing in appellate practice. He appeared numerous times before state and federal appellate courts in California, and has twice argued before the United States Supreme Court. After retiring in 1993, Guminski and his wife, Annegret, moved to Boulder, Colorado. He is an independent scholar, whose major interests are philosophy and constitutional law theory. He can be contacted at [aahugum@aol.com](mailto:aahugum@aol.com). His three recent articles concerning the Kalam Cosmological Argument are available at [http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/arnold\\_guminski/index.shtml](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/arnold_guminski/index.shtml).

*ABSTRACT*

Some Christian philosophers and apologists have vigorously mounted a moral argument for God's existence considered independently of the standard nonmoral grounds. The moral argument is based upon the natural moral law (fundamental moral principles and norms apprehended as such by persons of good will as universally binding and as not based upon supernatural revelation or divine positive law). Guminski proposes to show why those Naturalists and Theists who hold that the natural moral law obtains should conclude that the moral argument is unsound.

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Good evening. Thank you for coming to my talk. Perhaps some of you are here because you've asked yourself the question: "What in blazes is conservative metaphysical naturalism?" It has, I assure you, no political significance. If it did, I would have used something more politically incorrect—such as "reactionary metaphysical naturalism." Or, to be outrageous—"counter-revolutionary metaphysical naturalism." Well, I confess that in the secret chamber of my heart I would like to use the term "sensible metaphysical naturalism."<sup>1</sup> But I don't officially do so because I do not want to hurt anybody's feelings. I'm that kind of guy.

1. Tonight I want to explore with you one form of the so-called moral argument for God's existence, assuming (what I most willingly do in fact) that the natural moral law obtains. This argument prescind from the various standard nonmoral arguments for God's existence—chiefly the diverse cosmological, ontological, teleological, experiential, and inductive arguments. Hence, if the moral argument is to be at all persuasive for metaphysical naturalists who agree that the natural moral law obtains, then it must be grounded independently of the standard nonmoral arguments as well as what are believed to be supernaturally revealed truths. Theists who want to persuade naturalists that God exists based upon the moral argument must proceed with what for them is or may be a counterfactual assumption (made only for argument's sake) that all the nonmoral grounds for God's existence are insufficiently persuasive. The moral argument is thus not to be based upon any real or supposed supernatural private or public revelation, inspiration, or enlightenment. The argument I have in mind is one which, for the theologically conservative theist, should prescind from what he or she believes to be supernaturally revealed truths. In preparing this talk, I have paid particularly close attention to the writings of William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland,<sup>2</sup> considered as a team, and those of Paul Copan<sup>3</sup>— who have vigorously presented what is essentially the same argument. [The substance of the moral argument such as I have just defined is embedded in their writings. But there is much more besides. They have more prominently expounded what I call a moral-plus argument in which they heavily rely both upon nonmoral and moral grounds to argue for God's existence. This moral-plus argument is globally targeted against non-conservative metaphysical naturalism. This argument also supports a thesis much more encompassing than simply that of theism—principally regarding the immortality of the soul and a divine system of postmortem rewards and sanctions and that God has indeed supernaturally revealed truths. For the purposes of this talk, I focus on the moral argument simpliciter—that which prescind from all nonmoral grounds for God's existence and thus without what I deem to be extraneous matter in this context. Unless otherwise stated, I use the term "moral argument" to refer to *this* version.]

2. Yes—I am a metaphysical naturalist; but I do not intend to use this talk to seduce any theist from his persuasion. As in politics, so too in philosophy, there can be shifting alliances and coalitions. As a matter of fact, some theist philosophers and theologians do not accept as sound any specifically moral argument for God's existence—people such as Richard Swinburne,<sup>4</sup> John Finnis,<sup>5</sup> Germain Grisez,<sup>6</sup> to name but a few. Here I should like to stipulate that when I refer to supernaturally revealed truths I am speaking of what Protestant theologians, philosophers, and apologists

generally call "special revelation" but which their Catholic counterparts generally call simply "revelation."

3. By the term "God" I mean in the first place to refer to that one and only one supreme, purely spiritual, personal being, absolutely independent and self-sufficient, uncaused, eternal (whether atemporal or temporally everlasting), almighty, all-knowing, all-good, and profoundly inscrutable or incomprehensible in his ways, supremely happy in and from himself, and who created all other substances, natural and supernatural. To be sure, the terms "almighty, all-knowing, all-good" generate much disagreement about their meanings among theologically conservative theists. But it is enough for our purposes that the terms in question are to be understood as encompassing virtually everything plausibly within their respective scopes--save the patently absurd or the metaphysically impossible. To acknowledge that God exists is to acknowledge that the problem of evil has been somehow resolved or is resolvable in principle—such that God's all-goodness is somehow compatible with all the natural and moral evils that so abound in this universe. God's all-goodness entails that there are some things that God necessarily would not intend to do, although he might otherwise have the power to do them had he intended to do them.

4. God was absolutely free to have created or not to have created this universe, and absolutely free to create or not to create one or more other universes better or worse from a human viewpoint than this one—although everything he does must needs be consistent with his all-goodness. God has not only created this natural universe. He conserves or sustains it in its being from moment to moment. But he generally exercises his ordinary providence—that is the world goes on by way of secondary (that is natural) causes. God has the power to exercise what theologians call his extraordinary providence—which pertains to his working, or permitting other supernatural beings to work, miracles—events which are factually impossible absent special, direct supernatural intervention in the course of nature. God also has the power to make public or private supernatural revelations possibly disclosing otherwise unknowable truths about this world and a supernatural world. Finally, God has the power to sometimes act by way of his special providence: that is, he directly influences the outcome of events but in such a way that it cannot be known that a miracle has taken place in the absence of a divine assurance to that effect. The foregoing defines what I call the God of maximal theism.<sup>7</sup>

5. There is a more limited notion of God which we should bear in mind—what I call the God of basic theism. This refers to that one and only one absolutely independent and eternal supreme spiritual personal being who has at least some great power, knowledge, and goodness; and who was free to exercise the power to create this universe and in fact did so.<sup>8</sup> The God of maximal theism is but the God of basic theism writ large.<sup>9</sup> He is the God of the traditional monotheism—according to what I take to be the standard understanding.

6. A supernatural being is any disembodied personal being—such as God, angels and devils, and demigods—if any—and the disembodied human soul (assuming this is factually possible). But every human mind, even if it is a spiritual soul (according to

some version of substance dualism), is not a supernatural being. During the time it is embodied, it is part of the natural universe.

7. Metaphysical (or what is sometimes called philosophical) naturalism refers to several schools having in common the following doctrines. First, it is true, or presumptively true, that every natural event is caused by other natural events—leaving open the question of ontic determinism. Second, that either supernatural beings do not exist or that it is antecedently more probable than not that such beings do not exist, and that this net improbability has not as yet been satisfactorily discharged or overcome by argument or otherwise.<sup>10</sup> There are some atheists (whether they simply assert that they do not believe that God exists or instead positively deny his existence) who are not metaphysical naturalists because they believe that there are disembodied spirits—such as human souls while in a disembodied state.

8. Time constraints prevent me from discussing the various versions of metaphysical naturalism that are not "conservative"—most prominently what are commonly called physicalism (whether reductive or nonreductive),<sup>11</sup> and so-called scientism.<sup>12</sup> So, what I propose to do is to define some of the relevant principal characteristics of conservative metaphysical naturalism—and you will be able to infer more about the nature of those versions of naturalism which I have solemnly anathemized with bell, book and candle; although I promise never to cause their adherents to be delivered to a secularist version of the secular arm of the Church for proceedings pursuant to inquisitorial due process.

9. As it bears upon the moral argument the most important characteristics of conservative metaphysical naturalism include the following:

First: An emphatic rejection of of the principle of causal closure in the physical domain<sup>13</sup> and its twin-sibling-- epiphenomenalism,<sup>14</sup> with an equally emphatic affirmation of mind-body interaction. In short, some physical and mental events are severally caused by some other mental events. To be sure, there are physical events, states, or processes necessary for mental events or states to be causally efficacious. When I step on a tack, the physical event causes a mental state of mind, i.e. pain. Part of the cause of my going to the store to buy milk is the intention to go to the store to buy milk, and part of the cause of my intention to do so is my belief that I can obtain milk at the store, that my wife asked me to get milk, and I desire to satisfy my wife's request.

Second: An affirmation that human practical and theoretical reasoning encompass more than just computational thinking--that mechanistic "manipulation" of information by logistical rules. The greatest part of our thinking is indeed simply computational. But some of it is reasoning, as distinguished from mere computational calculation. Simple computational thinking, whether or not accompanied by consciousness, takes place when one automatically thinks according to the rules of a logic. But reasoning involves conscious apprehension of the logical relations among propositions, classes, and the like—so that we intuit, for example, that proposition r must be true because propositions p and q are true, and that their logical relation entails the truth of proposition r. We know, in some cases, that we believe proposition r to be true because we have

apprehended the true logical relation subsisting between propositions p and q and that these propositions are true. Similar considerations apply, necessary changes being made, to inductive reasoning. Humans are unique among all sentient animals in having the power of propositional speech and reasoning.<sup>15</sup>

Third: Given mind-body interaction, the conservative metaphysical naturalist might be an emergent substance-dualist—someone who holds that the mind is an emergent, immaterial entity produced by the human body (specifically the brain) when it becomes sufficiently configured in an appropriate way and which will cease to exist when the brain ceases to so configured.<sup>16</sup> Another possible scenario is that the human mind is the human brain which when appropriately configured has various mental powers or capacities, such as that of reasoning, imagining, perceiving, remembering, willing, and so forth.<sup>17</sup> And there are other possible scenarios consistent with the overall view of the conservative metaphysical naturalist that mind-body interaction obtains and that minds must necessarily be embodied.

Fourth: Humans are traditionally characterized as being rational animals. The actual power to reason is a first order disposition or potentiality—similar to the disposition to speak English. But the potentiality to eventually acquire the power to reason is a second order disposition—similar to the power to eventually have the power to speak English or some other specific language. Humans have relatively few innate but fairly many acquired first order dispositions. They have several innate second order dispositions or potentialities, some of which naturally emerge during various stages of development. Thus human infants have the second-order disposition or potentiality to so develop as to have the disposition or potentiality to effectively reason. However, favorable nature-and-nature conditions are required for humans to realize and to retain that potentiality. The difference in kind between humans and nonhuman animals does not entail that the qualitative difference in question did not emerge as the eventual result of a quantitatively continuous processes in the course of biological evolution.<sup>18</sup> Human nature is not constituted by what first order dispositions humans have. Rather it is constituted by all the ultimate and relevant second order potentialities or dispositions common to all members of the human species (with certain understood exceptions),<sup>19</sup> which they have at birth. Therefore, human beings are members of the species homo sapiens who have, or presumptively have, at birth the potentiality to eventually develop (nature and nurture permitting) into theoretically and practically rational persons of good will, who will be generally disposed and able to ordinarily follow the Golden Rule.<sup>20</sup>

Fifth: Conservative metaphysical naturalism includes an acceptance of a First Philosophy: namely synthetic principles (whether necessary or contingent) or postulates, neither being self-evident in the usual strict senses nor falsifiable empirical generalizations, which are presupposed and implicit in our making of our properly basic and incorrigible "common sense" beliefs (such as the existence of the external world or of other minds), and in the making of generalizations and inferences in ordinary life, as well as in historical, scientific, and forensic inquiry. These first principles are what some call the fundamental deliverances of natural reason.<sup>21</sup> [Among these principles is the causal principle that whatever beings to exist must have a cause for its beginning.<sup>22</sup> For the

conservative metaphysical naturalist, it is true or presumptively true that the cause for the beginning of any natural entity is itself natural—and this applies as well to the universe if it is the case that it began to exist. If the universe began to exist, then whatever temporal series includes (or is constituted by) the history of this universe are denumerably infinite and of infinite duration.<sup>23]</sup>

10. Enough has been said of conservative metaphysical naturalism for me to report that the presentations by Craig, Moreland, and Copan of the moral argument conflate the various forms of naturalism.<sup>24</sup> The metaphysical naturalist, as targeted by these advocates of the moral argument, is taken to be a nonconservative naturalist. Either that or it is earnestly contended that every naturalist should adhere (allegedly in the interest of consistency) to one version or another of nonconservative naturalism. Gentlemen, thanks a lot for lumping us naturalists all together—all the better to make us grist for your dialectical mills.

11. So what about the natural moral law? I could have perhaps used the term "natural law," but declined to do for a number of reasons—including that the term "natural law" tends to confuse or mislead far too many persons for it to be useful for our purposes.

12. Instead, I propose to use the term natural moral law in a rather broad sense so that the usage can be accepted by adherents of some metaethical theories besides those adhering to some one or another conventional natural law theory in, say, the Aristotelian or scholastic tradition. For historically, the term is to be understood in the light of how moral philosophy has developed in the Christian and post-Christian World. And, even for those of us who are not theists, it behooves us to maintain a term if it is highly useful to do so. So, in the first place, I take the natural moral law to embrace what are commonly understood among men and women of good will to be basic moral principles, precepts and norms universally binding on humanity for reasons other than being required by customary mores, or human or divine positive law, or as having been supernaturally revealed--directly or indirectly.<sup>25</sup> For example, we don't need our parents, professional philosophers, God, or the Holy Scripture, or Holy Mother Church to tell us anything in order for us to know that intentional homicide is presumptively immoral, and so on.

13. So I use the term natural moral law in contraposition to supernatural moral law, i.e., that moral law which is based upon supernatural revelation of what God positively commands or reveals to be declaratory of the universal moral law. The natural moral law is a term used to insure that we do not include such "moral" law which is solely predicated upon whether some external authority promulgates it—for it is possible for some people to say, when asked, whether such and such is immoral, that such and such is immoral because their parents say so, or that the Church says so, or that the Bible says so, and the principle to follow such authority has been individually internalized as a matter of conscience.

14. The principles, precepts and norms of the natural moral law are internally experienced as categorical imperatives, not as just means-ends indicatives. They are

immediately presented to the conscience as providing the supreme guide of conduct in private and public matters. They are not presented as either coming from without or as having been chosen. Persons of good will, or those who try to be as best they can, have personally internalized these rules as a matter of individual conscience.<sup>26</sup> So it is true, that conscientious persons of good will by nature do or try to do what this law requires and show that (figuratively speaking) this law is written on their hearts, and to which their conscience bears witness.<sup>27</sup> So what is the proverbial bottom line? It is that we are all human beings. Therefore let us treat each other and ourselves as human beings. And how are we treat ourselves and other human beings as human beings?<sup>28</sup> We do so by conforming, as best we can, to such universal moral rules, precepts and norms as are in harmony with those basic principles and ideals which necessarily characterize rational men and women of good will.<sup>29</sup> Rational men and women of good will will either have, or more likely highly value, what they conceive to be an *ideal* human nature. The components of an ideal human nature are those powers or potentialities humans *should* have in fact if they are to be rational persons of good will.<sup>30</sup> For example, the person of good will is someone who actually has a power to effectively reason, and the realization of this power is initially factually possible for every person born with the potentiality to eventually have the power to reason, nature and nurture permitting. Similarly, the person of good will is the person who values peace and tranquility as a necessary condition for human flourishing both individually and in society.

15. The fundamental principles and rules of the natural moral law are not relative to any particular nation, people, or culture. Assuming that the natural moral law obtains, we have what can be taken to be epistemologically objective moral facts. [To say that something is epistemologically objective is to say that something is right or wrong independent of what particular persons think about the matter.] It is an epistemologically objective<sup>31</sup> moral fact that it is presumptively immoral to intend to kill or bodily injure another person; that it is absolutely immoral to torture someone just for the fun of it; that it is absolutely immoral to enslave other humans, whatever the race; and so on. To be sure, to assert that such-and-such is immoral is not the same as to assert what is a descriptive law of nature as determined in the natural sciences. But it is a proposition, and therefore it has a truth-or-false value. A statement which asserts that such-and-such is morally wrong, or morally right, or morally indifferent is a statement as to what is forbidden, required, or permitted by the natural moral law. Hence it is not a proposition of the kind what lawyers would call a matter of fact (that is of concrete fact), but rather a matter of law (that is of legal fact). The natural moral law for the most part consists of imperatives which regulate or recommend conduct, or which define statuses and assign functions. The natural moral law is not so many descriptive laws of nature or empirical laws, nor so many positive laws imposed by God or some human authority, nor conventions subject to revision by the collective will of a community. The natural moral law is law—a set of imperatives or prescriptives—but there is no lawmaker in the sense of some entity who wills the law to obtain or not to obtain.

16. So, here is another characteristic of the conservative metaphysical naturalist: he holds that the natural moral law obtains, and that there are many epistemologically objective moral facts. Moreover, he maintains that the natural moral law is somehow

rooted in the facts about human nature -- conceived as being that set of radical (that is basic or second order) potentialities or dispositions of what are commonly thought to be uniquely human and which constitute what persons consider to be the constituents of an ideal human nature. Whether or not the patient or object of any particular moral duty is a human, rather than some other kind of sentient animal, is therefore of cardinal importance and relevance in judging whether such duty applies in a given case. But this is not to say that humans do not have some significant moral duties with respect to sentient animals, as well as to the environment generally.

17. Advocates of the moral argument are commonly willing to acknowledge that many naturalists lead, or earnestly try to lead, morally good lives—granted that there will be some important differences of opinion or belief about some very important issues. And here, to return the compliment, I should like to acknowledge that there are many theists, including even those who accept some system of purported supernatural revelation, who lead or earnestly try to lead morally good lives because they too are persons of good will. Advocates of the moral argument are even willing to say (at least at the outset) that naturalists can be said to objectively know various truths pertaining to the content of the natural moral law. What they additionally assert is that the naturalist who holds that the natural moral law obtains is without a sufficient ontological foundation (that is a foundation based on reality).<sup>32</sup>

18. Ladies and gentlemen: before properly addressing this issue, I have to here announce that it is now time for our evening scripture readings. True I am a naturalist, but I do not propose to proceed with these readings because I perversely want to demonstrate that there are others besides Satan who can quote scripture to their ends. Rather, I do so in order to helpfully provide additional background.

19. My first reading is from the Book of Genesis,<sup>33</sup> chapter 1, verses 26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let them have domination over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

So what is standardly believed to be the meaning of God having created man, male and female, in his own image? As it turns out, this standard meaning is accurately stated by our friends William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland. According to their summa, *Philosophical Foundations of a Christian Worldview*, the definition of the image of God "includes the ability to engage in abstract reasoning, especially in areas having to do with ethical, religious and philosophical issues. God himself is a rational being, and humans are made like him in this respect."<sup>34</sup> To be rational, according to Craig and Moreland, is "the ultimate capacity or power to form concepts, think, deliberate, reflect, have intentionality (mental states like thoughts, beliefs, sensations that are *of* or *about* things)."<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere they write: "What makes the human soul a person is that the human soul is equipped with rational faculties of intellect and volition that enable it to be

a self-reflective agent of self-determination. Now God is very much like an unembodied soul; indeed, as a mental substance, God just seems to be a soul. We naturally equate a rational soul with a person, since the human souls with which we are acquainted are persons."<sup>36</sup> And, in favorably commenting upon Immanuel Kant's doctrine that human persons are members of the kingdom of ends, interpreted by them as meaning that humans should never be treated solely as a means to an end, Craig and Moreland declare: "Arguably, the most plausible way to justify this principle is in light of the biblical doctrine that human persons are created in the image of God."<sup>37</sup> Somewhat similar remarks are made by Paul Copan, their ally in the moral argument venture, in his several writings. Thus in a recently published essay Copan declares: "objective moral values...are properly grounded in a theistic world view in which human beings have been uniquely created in God's image and thus reflect certain divine properties in important – even if limited ways."<sup>38</sup> And indeed these opinions are in so many words essentially the same as the dominant view traditional held by Christian theologians and philosophers throughout the ages, such as St. Augustine,<sup>39</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas,<sup>40</sup> John Calvin,<sup>41</sup> and, more recently, Alvin Plantinga.<sup>42</sup> Last, but by no means least, is the declaration by that good and great pontiff, Pope John XXIII, who addressed his celebrated encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of 1963 to all men of good will. In it he declared: "God created man 'in His own image and likeness,' endowed him with intelligence and freedom, and made him lord of creation."<sup>43</sup> Moreover he stated: "The foundation of a well ordered and prosperous society lies in the principle that every man is a person endowed by nature with intelligence and free will. Hence he has rights and duties of his own, flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature and, therefore, universal, inviolable and inalienable."<sup>44</sup> For the theologically sophisticated theist, the proximate ontological foundation of the natural moral law lies in that man is in the natural image of God: namely, that he is a person: a living being endowed with the radical (that is basic) potentiality to become rational and to govern oneself, and to become a person of good will. Unless humans have the radical potentiality of being practically and theoretically rational with a power of self-determination, they would be wholly incapable of ever having moral qualities and thus being responsible for their acts.

20. My second reading is also from Genesis, chapter 9, verse 6. After the Deluge, among other things God declares to Noah:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.

Here God does not just peremptorily command humans not to kill other humans—relying upon supremely sovereign divine authority as the basis of his command. No--God went out of his way to expressly assign the reason for the prohibition: to wit, he made man in his own image.

21. My third and final reading is from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapter 2, verses 14-16:

When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires,

they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

The standard interpretation of this text among theologically conservative Christians is that such humans, those who are neither Jews (formerly bound by the God-given positive law of Moses and the prophets) nor Christians (now bound by the positive law of the gospel through Jesus Christ), are nevertheless bound by another law, a nonpositive law, a law written on their hearts by God through nature and to which their conscience bears witness. And this is the Christian counterpart of the conservative metaphysical naturalist's notion of the natural moral law: that universal moral law of which humans are capable of being aware by the light of natural reason and conscience--unaided by supernatural revelation and as unmodified by divine positive law. Of course, the theologically conservative Christian holds that the natural moral law presumptively obtains—but that God's positive law may ostensibly require or allow more than what is required or allowed by the natural moral law absent such divine positive law. And that is because the natural moral law pertains to humans as having a natural end; whereas the divine positive law principally looks to the ordering of man toward God,<sup>45</sup> especially as it pertains to humans as having a supernatural end.<sup>46</sup>

22. Although it is standard Christian doctrine that God's existence and his basic nature can be known by humans by the light of their natural reason, and that they can similarly know what the basics of what are required by the natural moral law (see Romans, chapters 1 and 2), it nowhere appears that God has specifically revealed that humans can know by the light of their natural reason that they will survive death.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, although some Christian philosophers and theologians have argued otherwise, many others believe that the only way one can be reasonably sure of the immortality of the soul is by virtue of a supernatural revelation to that effect.

23. According to standard Christian doctrine, God has willed that humans (some humans at least) will have a supernatural life with God after death—consisting in the beatific vision—seeing God face to face, as it were, in a state of everlasting bliss. It is also possible that other humans will lead a postmortem everlasting life in much less favorable circumstances—perhaps consignment to that Other Place which is so unfashionable to mention nowadays. It is standardly understood (to be sure with some dissent among theologically conservative Christians) that God immediately creates each human with an immortal soul, theologians differing among themselves as to when this precisely occurs—such as at conception or sometime after conception but by birth at the latest. Theologically conservative Christians strongly differ as to the postmortem fate of humans following the Fall of Adam and Eve. But they almost all agree that all humans are destined to have a life everlasting and that at least some are to have a supernatural life with God. God has supernaturally revealed truths directing humans how they can best believe and behave and thereby enhance the likelihood of enjoying supernatural life with him in heaven and otherwise maximally pleasing him—all these truths being amply

confirmed by divine miracles and fulfilled prophecies.

24. But God in his utterly inscrutable wisdom, according to maximal theism, was perfectly free not to have provided humans with a postmortem life, either with him or in some other fashion. The possibility of a supernatural life is a free gift of grace on his part. Therefore God, in his inscrutable wisdom, could have willed that the human race was to lead exclusively natural lives and live out these lives in a thoroughly natural way for exclusively natural ends. Were God to have created such a universe, it would be necessarily good—and God would necessarily have had a good reason for having created such a universe.<sup>48</sup>

25. Some theists, who acknowledge the natural moral law but who do not believe that there has been a supernatural revelation, are likely to hold that there are some duties pertaining to God. Obviously the naturalist, on the other hand, who acknowledges the natural moral law, will hold that the natural moral law only embodies duties *to* himself and *to* other humans, and some duties of a different scope and with a different rationale with respect to other sentient animals and to the environment. He might hold that we have duties to humans with respect to religious matters—but this is different from having duties to God.

26. So those theists who believe in a supernatural revelation have to put themselves in the shoes of conservative metaphysical naturalists in order to understand what such persons regard as the fundamental principles or norms of the natural moral law insofar as it is exclusively this-world-centered.

27. The moral argument is that if the natural moral law obtains then God exists. In other words, if God does not exist, then the natural moral law does not obtain. Suppose someone contends that the natural moral law obtains because God exists; and that we know that God exists based upon general nonmoral grounds.<sup>49</sup> But this is not the moral argument for God's existence. The rules of our project are such that the conservative metaphysical naturalist is supposed to have "survived" running the gauntlet of all the standard nonmoral arguments. The moral argument has to proceed for its advocate with what for him is the counterfactual assumption made for argument's sake that the universe is such that humans have appeared on the earth in the ordinary course of nature complete with all those characteristics which, according to the standard opinion among theologically conservative Christians, constitute the natural image of God. But these characteristics constitute the proximate ontological foundation for the natural moral law for both the conservative metaphysical naturalist and the theologically conservative Christian. So both parties the natural moral law have the same proximate basis in reality.

28. One who believes that the God of maximal theism exists is able to readily and plausibly explain that the natural moral law with its foundation obtains because the same has been, directly or indirectly (through secondary causes) created by God. On the other hand, the believer in basic theism—which does not initially define God as morally perfect—can postulate that the Basic God is morally perfect and that this forms part of the explanation of why the natural moral law with its foundation obtains. But this is not the

moral argument that we have been evaluating.

29. We see that the argument--if God does not exist then the natural moral law with its foundation does not obtain—is not likely to be regarded as plausibly sound by the conservative metaphysical naturalist unless, perhaps, it is much more closely tailored. How can this possibly be done? Well, the maximal theist might say: it is factually impossible for the natural moral law with its foundation to obtain, unless God exists and he supernaturally and specially intervenes in the course of nature so that the natural moral law and its foundation obtain. But why is it metaphysically impossible for the natural moral law with its proximate foundation to obtain in the ordinary course of nature? Oh! I marvel at the audacity of those maximal theists who would boldly and rashly assert that God's absolute liberty and omnipotence does not encompass the free power to create a universe essentially similar to ours but in which, in the ordinary course of nature, the human race appears and with it the proximate ontological foundation for the natural moral law. And since such a power is within the scope of the Maximal God's omnipotence, it could be very well the case that this universe is actually one in which the requisite foundation of the natural moral law has actually obtained in the ordinary course of nature. So the moral argument fails for both the conservative metaphysical naturalist and the traditional monotheist. [Of course, the foregoing remarks prescind from any supposed supernatural revelation.]

30. The advocate of the moral argument should not complain that, although God could have created such a universe as proposed in my scenario, he has not actually done so. For to repeat ourselves: the conservative metaphysical naturalist has survived running the gauntlet of the nonmoral arguments. Therefore the given for him, and what must be assumed *arguendo* for our purposes, is that humans together with all their essential intellectual, moral, and so on potentialities appeared on the planet in the ordinary course of nature. There is nothing to suggest to him that the natural moral law with its proximate foundation could not have obtained in the ordinary course of nature given that humans naturally have that which is the naturalist equivalent of the natural image of God.

31. Unlike those naturalists who are not "conservative"—conservative metaphysical naturalist do not have to shrink from the alleged ontological "queerness" of the natural moral law and its proximate foundation obtaining in the ordinary course of nature. True, some (such as I) might reject some claims made about those qualities called "objective moral values" or "intrinsic dignity" should they be defined as being substantive, nonrelational properties.<sup>50</sup> But such rejection would not be upon the ground that the alleged "queerness" of such alleged properties is incompatible with metaphysical naturalism. [Moreover, if these allegedly "queer" entities are so metaphysically impossible such that they could not obtain in the ordinary course of nature in any possible natural universe, then they are also beyond the scope of God's power to work miracles.] Nevertheless, conservative metaphysical naturalists would wonder why those among their fellow naturalists who are very much in the empiricist tradition should scruple or worry about the alleged "queerness" of nonphysical properties such as intentional states of mind (such as beliefs and purposing), their causal efficacy, the human reasoning power, and the obtaining of the natural moral law. After all it was David Hume, the patriarch of modern

empiricism, who wrote in his *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (section 12, part 3):

The existence, therefore, of any being can only be proved by arguments from its cause or its effect, and these arguments are founded entirely on experience. If we reason *a priori*, anything may appear able to produce anything. The falling of a pebble may, for aught we know, extinguish the sun, or the wish of a man control the planets in their orbits. It is only experience which teaches us to infer the existence of one object from another.<sup>51</sup>

32. The moral argument remains unpersuasive even if recast in the form of an inference to best explanation. We know by hypothesis that this universe, complete with humans with their special characteristics, exists and that the natural moral law with whatever is its foundation obtain. If we assume conservative metaphysical naturalism, then in order to "explain" that the natural moral law and its proximate ontological foundation obtain all we must do is to postulate that the same obtains in the ordinary course of nature—and hence is metaphysically possible. Our advocate of the moral argument, I must remind you, cannot rely upon any of the nonmoral arguments. He must therefore postulate the God of basic theism, or perhaps that of maximal theism, as not only having created this universe such that the human race appeared in the ordinary course of nature but that God also had to supernaturally, specially intervene in the course of nature in order for the natural moral law and its proximate ontological foundation to obtain. It is quite clear what is the better hypothesis in terms of compliance with William of Ockham's Razor: that entities are not to be unnecessarily multiplied. The conservative metaphysical naturalist does not have to postulate the existence of substances of a kind radically different from those dreamt of in his philosophy. But the advocate of the moral argument is required to postulate the existence of God—whose existence for the naturalist is antecedently more improbable than not—and that God had to miraculously intervene in the course of nature in order to insure the obtaining of the natural moral law with its requisite foundation.

33. Let us try another approach. I know that the external world exists and I know that other minds exist. These beliefs are deeply embedded in our belief-structure. Now I know that the external world and that other minds exist and I know that such knowledge does not presuppose knowledge that God exists. It may be the case that I would not know that the external world and that other minds exist unless God exists—assuming that God does exist and that he creates a universe such that I can know that there are external objects and that other minds exist. But this is another issue. My knowledge that the external world and that other minds exist is absolutely certain such that were I to become a theist it would never be upon the ground that otherwise I would not know that the external world and that other minds exists. I am certain that my beliefs that the external world and other minds exists have the requisite proximate ontological foundation without the need to ascertain what is the ultimate foundation (i.e., cause) of my knowledge. Indeed, I have been a theist, firmly believing at one time that God exists; but somehow, I assure you, my knowledge in the existence of the external world and other minds have

somehow survived the loss of theistic belief. So too I also know that the natural moral law obtains and that I also know many epistemologically objective moral facts. My knowledge of these matters does not depend upon whether I know or believe God to exist. And since I know that the natural moral law obtains, I also know that there is a proximate ontological foundation for such knowledge without having to know what is the ultimate cause of such foundation. And as a matter of fact, I am aware of what that proximate ontological foundation is: that humans have those characteristics which are the equivalent of those constituting the natural image of God according to standard Christian opinion. The claim has been made that our belief that there are properly basic moral truths are subject to defeaters.<sup>52</sup> But if, as the advocates of the moral argument insist, the naturalist lacks the requisite proximate ontological foundation for the obtaining of the natural moral law, then it cannot be the case that he *knows or can know* that the natural moral law obtains. And this is contrary to their assurances that the naturalist can despite everything know moral truths.<sup>53</sup> [And, it should not be overlooked, that since according to the standard opinion of theologically conservative Christians there is a moral obligation on the part of the nontheist to make a reasonably diligent and intellectually honest inquiry as to whether God exists and that failure to do so is at least presumptively culpable, it follows that that this obligation presupposes the nontheist knowing that the natural moral law obtains with its proximate foundation.<sup>54</sup>]

34. [Seeking the Achilles' heel of any version of naturalism, it is urged by advocates of the moral argument that the natural moral law lacks an adequate system of sanctions unless theism is true.<sup>55</sup> But this objection lacks merit, for it presupposes that the omnipotent and perfectly free and happy God of maximal theism is somehow required to provide adequate sanctions for the natural moral law in this or some postmortem world. Of course, quite a bit depends upon what God, perfectly free, omnipotent, and utterly inscrutable that he is, is willing to provide for humans. But I cannot but here present to you the views of one very theologically orthodox account of the matter:<sup>56</sup>

[P]hilosophical morality, taken by itself, is very imperfect, and that it gains in simplicity and force by being supported by the will of a supreme legislator and judge. We shall see, almost immediately, that without God there can be no adequate sanction for moral relations. But, admitting the imperfection and want of sanction, what follows? Perhaps the moral order is imperfect, and there is no proper sanction. It would be desirable, indeed, that it should be otherwise; but many things which are not actual are very desirable. Unless you are an optimist and regard the present world as the best that could possibly be created, you must admit that it has many defects which it would be well if we could remove. There are defects even in the moral order...[but] it does not follow that God exists because otherwise the universe or any part of it would be very imperfect; nor, consequently, that his existence is proved because there is no other conceivable way in which the moral law can be provided with a sanction and made complete.<sup>57</sup>]

35. I want to point out something rather troubling. Drs. Copan, Craig, and Moreland

argue that the practical commitment of naturalists to conform to the natural moral law (making due allowance for their lack of belief in the supernatural) lacks the requisite proximate ontological foundation. But to fallaciously urge, as these writers do, that *any* version of naturalism lacks the requisite proximate foundation for the natural moral law appears to me to constitute an implicit suggestion that it is not practically reasonable for naturalists to conform to that law in such cases whenever it would be in one's self-interest not to do so.<sup>58</sup> [This kind of appeal is not likely to affect such naturalists who already do not believe that the natural moral law obtains and who are neither persons of good will nor earnestly try to be. It may act as a scare-tactic and induce those insecure theists, apprehensive that loss of religious commitment will be followed by immoral behavior, to persist in their religious beliefs. Let us all earnestly hope that all those theists who believe that without God all is permitted will never change their minds! There are also likely to be unintended counter-productive consequences with respect to such naturalists as are less sure that the natural moral law (or objective moral values) obtain than they are that it is unreasonable to believe that God exists.]

36. In fine, it seems to me that the moral argument [as well as the moral-plus argument] as presented in this hard-sell, slash-and-burn apologetical enterprise operates as an unintended to be sure but nevertheless pernicious-in-effect subverter of natural morality. [It moreover tends to unnecessarily generate feelings of ill-will between theists and naturalists (and atheists). I suggest that there is a prima facie basis to question at the outset the soundness of the moral argument (even if temperately presented) based upon the very fact that it is so structured that its rejection by *any* metaphysical naturalist entails that he is practically unreasonable in holding that he should conform to the natural moral law as a matter of *moral* principle.<sup>59</sup>] Assuming the truth of theologically conservative Christianity, I just wonder what explanations will be required of our writers "on that day when," in the words of St. Paul, "according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." For, according to that gospel as I understand it, we are all enjoined as a matter of moral principle to treat ourselves and others as human beings--both by the natural moral law and the positive divine law.

[13 April 2004]

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use the term "conservative metaphysical naturalist" rather than what might be some rather tendentious term such as "sensible naturalist," suggested in William Hasker's "What About a Sensible Naturalism: A Response to Victor Reppert," *Philosophia Christi* 5 (2003), at 53-62. A careful study of *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (ed. William Lane Craig & J. P. Moreland) (New York: Routledge, 2000) and Dallas Willard, "Naturalism's Incapacity to Capture the Good Will," *Philosophia Christi* 4 (2002) 9-28, would provide many valuable clues as to what species of metaphysical naturalism are most likely to be vulnerable to the more plausible censures of theists, and particularly Christian theists.

<sup>2</sup> J. P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), at 490-496. See also Craig's contributions on the moral and the moral-plus arguments in *Does God Exist? The Craig-Flew Debate* (ed. Stan W. Wallace) (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), at 21-22, 30, 35, 38, 44-45, 168-169.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Copan, "The Moral Argument," in *The Rationality of Theism* (ed. Paul Copan & Paul K. Moser) (Routledge: New York: 2003), at 149; "Atheistic Goodness Revisited: A Personal Reply to Michael Martin," *Philosophia Christi*, 2 (2003): 91-105; "Can Michael Martin Be a Moral Realist? *Sic et Non*," *Philosophia Christi*, 2, (1999): 45-72

<sup>4</sup> "Morality and God," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 3/2003) – n0 225, at 315-328, in which Swinburne (surely among the most eminent of Christian philosophers of religion) states "is the latest version of my views on this topic." *Ibid.*, 315 n. 1. However, readers may still profitably read the more accessible *The Coherence of Theism* (Clarendon Press, rev'd ed. 1993), ch. 11; and *Responsibility and Atonement* (Clarendon Press, 1989), chs. 1, 8. According to him, "No action can be just morally good or bad; it is good or bad because it has other non-moral properties...A difference in moral properties has to arise from a difference in non-moral properties...Moral properties ... are supervenient on non-moral properties. And the supervenience must be logical supervenience....If there are moral truths, there are necessary moral truths—general principles of morals." (*Ibid.*, at 319.) According to him, the basic moral general truths are *analytically* necessary and for that reason are objective. In his article "Necessary Moral Truths and the Need for Explanation," *Philosophia Christi*, 2 (2000), at 105-112, Gregory E. Ganssle recognizes that Swinburne "has...provided a [what Ganssle characterizes as a good] strategy for an atheist or an agnostic to avoid moral arguments for God " (*Ibid.*, at 107.) Assuming *arguendo* that Swinburne is right, Ganssle argues that "there is a strong fine-tuning argument for God's existence that can be made from the applicability and the fittingness of the moral truths to the beings in the universe." (*Ibid.*, at 112.) The argument, however, turns out to be yet another species of what I describe as a moral-plus argument. This is so because he argues based upon "[a] chance process set into motion by the totally random initial conditions of the universe for fifteen or twenty billion years and at the end, totally by accident, moral creatures emerge—creations that exactly match the moral truths that have been waiting in the wings throughout the whole show." (*Ibid.*, at 110.) But the probative value of the argument has force only with respect to those metaphysical naturalists who who are so improvident as to think that (to use Ganssle's words) "our universe came about by chance." (*Ibid.*) Moreover, his thesis that the theistic hypothesis is more probable than not based upon fine-tuning considerations fails to adequately take into account that a naturalist is unlikely to concede it is more probable than not that that supposed supernatural being who allegedly created and fine-tuned the universe a finite time ago is metaphysically possible. At the very worst, there is a draw between the antecedent improbability of God and the evidential probability of his existence based upon the fine-tuning moral argument.

<sup>5</sup> John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), at 48-50.

<sup>6</sup> Germain D. Grisez, "The First Principles of Practical Reason," in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. Anthony Kenny) (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Co, Inc. Anchor Books, 1969), at 376-377.

<sup>7</sup> The God of maximal theism, as I have defined it, hopefully conforms to the standard understanding among theologically conservative Christians of God's essential attributes, and are comprehensively set forth in such credal statements as that by Vatican Council I (1870), sess. 3, ch. 1; and the Westminster Confession of Faith (166), ch. 2, secs. 1 & 2. The God of maximal theism is defined in terms of what, according to theologically conservative Christians, is naturally knowable or reasonably probable as established by argument or nonpropositional evidence—as distinguished from those doctrines that are only knowable by supernatural revelation. It is gratifying to see how commendably orthodox Craig and Moreland, and Copan are about the doctrines concerning God's perfect liberty and omnipotence. For example, Copan writes: "God was not obligated to create at all. Nor was God, having freely willed to create, obliged to make the best possible world – only a good one, but not a less-than-good one. God is also not obligated to communicate with and enter into covenant relations with his creatures. He is not morally compelled to forgive human transgressions nor to give second chances to those who have defied his authority." "Moral Argument," at 173 n. 91. Craig writes: "Since it is possible that there is no best possible world, it is not necessary that God create such a world. The most that His omnibenevolence would seem to require is that He create a world in which the evil is not on balance greater than the good. But for any world He creates, there may always be a better one." "Theism and Big Bang Cosmology," in William Lane Craig & Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), at 230; see also his "A Criticism of the Cosmological Argument for God's Non-Existence," in *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*, at 261-263.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., the remarks made by William Lane Craig in *Five Views on Apologetics* (ed. Steven B. Cowan) (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishin House, 2000), at 320-321, where he accepts that it is sufficient to identify as the personal creator of the universe ex nihilo as God, without necessarily attributing to him omniscience, omnipotence, or moral perfection.

<sup>9</sup> I willingly concede that the God of maximal theism or basic theism is logically possible; but I do not think of either as being metaphysically possible—another issue entirely—but I waive this point for argument's sake.

<sup>10</sup> According to Moreland and Craig: "Philosophical Naturalism . . . is the philosophical doctrine that the natural world is all there is and that God, angels, and the like do not exist." *Philosophical Foundations*, at 358.

<sup>11</sup> "[H]istorically speaking, materialism," according to Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, at 229, "was the view that the only substances that exist are material substances, but (1) some of these substances (living organisms) may possess a duality of

material and immaterial properties and (2) immaterial abstract objects (e.g., sets, universals) may also exist." "Hard materialism," more frequently called "physicalism" in recent decades is, according to Moreland and Craig, *ibid.* at 230, "the view that all entities are merely physical entities. There are no abstract objects, and all substances, properties and events are merely physical entities. Some physicalists hold that while there are only physical substances, there are genuinely mental properties that emerge from and are dependent on their physical bases. This view seems to be a version of property dualism, and we will treat it as such." Clearly, the authors understand this form of property dualism to be epiphenomenalistic. Cf. *ibid.*, at 242,

<sup>12</sup> Moreland and Craig define "[s]trong scientism [as] the view that some proposition or theory is true and/or rational to believe if and only if it is a scientific proposition or theory that, in turn, depends on its having been successfully formed, tested and used according to appropriate scientific methodology. There are no truths apart from scientific truths, and even if there were, there would be no reason whatever to believe them." (*Ibid.*, at 347.) The authors claim without sufficient warrant that strong scientism is self-refuting because it is offered as true; but *au contraire* it is offered as being *analytically* true and not true as a matter of fact as to *concrete entities*. Otherwise the definition is good enough for our purposes. The authors also define "weak scientism" as the view "that science is the most valuable, most serious and most authoritative sector of human learning." Accordingly, "[t]o the degree that some issue or belief outside science can be given scientific support or can be reduced to science, to that degree the issue or belief becomes rationally acceptable." *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> William Hasker (unfortunately) using "materialism" and "physicalism" as synonymous, summarily says: "causal closure is a requirement for all materialists without exception, while supervenience must be affirmed by materialists who are realists about the mental." *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), at 61. But "the supervenience principle comes into play to insure that ... mental facts are determined by physical facts" for someone who "is in some minimal sense a realist about the mental, so that mental facts exist." *Ibid.*, at 60-61. Hasker writes: "The closure principle says that all physical events have physical causes." (*Ibid.*, at 60.) He helpfully describes the principle as having two components: (1) "All physical causation and physical explanation must be mechanistic" (*ibid.*, at 62); and (2) "Mechanical causation and mechanistic explanation are fundamentally nonteleological" (*ibid.*, at 63). These formulations are offered so that there is "some way to understand 'physical' that will be sufficiently flexible to allow for future scientific progress, yet will constrain the meaning enough that it doesn't become too nebulous for useful discussion" (*ibid.*, at 62).

<sup>14</sup> Epiphenomenalism is the doctrine that no mental state or event is causally efficacious.

<sup>15</sup> For helpful discussions of human intellectual powers, see inter alia: Richard Swinburne, *Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), at 203-219; C. D. Broad, *Ethics* (C. Lewy) (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), at 12-21, and his *The Mind and its Place in Nature* (Paterson NJ: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1960), at 333-335, and Mortimer J. Adler, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes* (New

York: Fordham University Press, 1967).

<sup>16</sup> William Hasker, a Christian theist, persuasively argues for an emergent substance-dualism in his *The Emergent Self*. A problem arises concerning survival of the soul after death. He suggests that an omnipotent God, after all, can supernaturally sustain the now disembodied soul pending the resurrection of the body. A naturalist, rejecting any proviso regarding supernatural sustaining of the soul after death, could consistently otherwise adhere to Hasker's well thought out scenario.

<sup>17</sup> One of the very best expositions of how it is metaphysically possible (or rather, that it is has not been shown to be metaphysically impossible) for one and the same substance or event to have mental and physical characteristics properties, consistent with mind-body interaction, is given by C. D. Broad in his *Mind and its Place*, at 625-629. Although he briefly flirted with epiphenomenalism in this book, he abandoned it in later writings. (See, e.g., in his "Present Relations of Science and Religion," in *Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Co, Inc., 1953), at 240: and see his remarks in his "A Reply to My Critics" in *The Philosophy of C. D. Broad* (ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp) (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1959), at 791-792.

<sup>18</sup> See the brief but excellent discussion of the foregoing matters C.D. Broad, *Ethics*, at 12-14.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mortimer J. Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth* (New York: Macmillon Publishing Co., 1990), at 145-156 for his fine disucssion of the nature of human nature as being a set of ultimate or second-order determinable potentialities to acquire determinate potentialities.

<sup>20</sup> I have sought to define, but somewhat incompletely, human being or person so that actually having the power to reason is not an essential attribute thereof, since this would exclude infants and those humans who have lost their power to reason. On the other hand, I have defined human being in terms of having been born to accord with common usage (that a human being is every man, woman, and child). Thus every human is defined as having been born with the with the potentiality of acquiring the power to reason. I do not offer this definition to preclude moral rules respecting abortions—since I hold that the natural moral law requires that some fetuses be deemed to be persons for some purposes. According to Harold J. Morowitz & James S. Trefill, *The Facts of Life: Science and the Abortion Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), at 152: "Up to the end of the second trimester of pregnancy, nerve cells accumulate in the brain and differentiate, but it isn't until the seventh month and beyond that significant numbers of connections between those cells are formed....It is only when the system is 'wired up' by synaptic connections that the fetus, in our terms, has acquired humanness. The process starts at around twenty-four weeks of gestation and cotnines well into childhood." David Boonin, in his *A Defense of Abortion* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), at 122-127, plausibly attributes moral status to the fetus once it has organized electrical activity in its cerebral cortex in accord with a modified-future-just-like-ours argument. In any event, although acknowledging that reasonable minds differ on the

matter, I opt for what amounts to a naturalist equivalent of a modern version of the mediate animation thesis, the dominant view in the Western Church until the nineteenth century and so eminently compatible with conservative metaphysical naturalism once stripped of its theological trappings. Cf. Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, at 179-180; Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* Cambridge University Press, 2002), at 105-120; *Theology and Evolution* (ed. E. C. Messenger) (Westminster MD: Newman Press, 1949) at 217-332. To assert that the fetus who is not in the actual; process of becoming sentient is not to be deemed a person does not entail that the natural moral law does not include moral duties with respect to it.

<sup>21</sup> See inter alia: Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Cambridge MS: M.I.T. Press, 1969), at 593-644; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). C. D. Broad preferred to speak of *postulates*, describing them in *Mind and its Place*, at 217, but doing so more succinctly in his essay "Critical and Speculative Philosophy," in *Contemporary British Philosophy: Personal Statements* (First series) (ed. J. H. Muirhead) (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1924), at 77-100. He wrote: "I do not find [postulates] self-evident. I do not know of any self-evident premises from which they could be deduced by any known logical principles. Hence I cannot group them as *a priori* propositions. If they are to be grouped as empirical propositions they would have to come under the head of inferred empirical propositions. And this seems impossible for most of them. All inductions make some assumption about the structure of nature, which may be called the 'Uniformity of Nature,' for want of a better name. It would evidently be circular to try to prove such a proposition inductively. Again, any particular perceptual judgment may be defended by argument if we grant the general principle that all *sensa* are appearances of physical objects. But I can see no possibility of inferring this principle either inductively or deductively from the existence and correlations of *sensa*. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to refute these propositions by argument. And in practice everyone assumes them, and it is difficult to see that we could possibly unify our experience or that we should have any motive for carrying our researches further if we did not assume them to be true." Even Bertrand Russell, in his *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), at 487-496, found himself required to formulate postulates required to validate scientific method. As he put it: "we may be said to 'know' what is necessary for scientific inference, given that it fulfills the following conditions: (1) it is true, (2) we believe it, (3) it leads to no conclusions which experience confutes, (4) it is logically necessary if any occurrence or set of occurrences is ever to afford evidence in favor of any other occurrence." (Ibid., at 496.)

<sup>22</sup> As stated by C. D. Broad, in *Kant: An Introduction* (ed. C. Lewy) (Cambridge University Press, 1978), at 218: "I suspect that my difficulty about a first event or phase in the world's history is due to the fact that, whatever I may *say* when I am trying to give Hume a run for his money, I cannot really *believe* in anything beginning to exist without being *caused* (in the old-fashioned sense of *produced* or *generated*) by something else which existed before and up to the moment when the entity in question began to exist." The causal principle is not that of causal determinism, whether ontic or epistemic, or that

the principle entails that whatever constitutes the cause of the beginning of the existence of an entity is, under the circumstances, a set of necessary and sufficient conditions.

<sup>23</sup> It astonishes me that many philosophers and others manifest such a touching docility in accepting as plausible that the universe and time absolutely began uncaused based upon their understanding of the probative value of the evidence favoring the Standard Big Bang Model, or some modified cosmological model with an initial singularity. It is no wonder why theists are so widely perceived as winning by default the debate, raised by the renaissance of the Kalam Cosmological Argument, by vigorously asserting the causal principle—albeit construed by them to admit creation by a supernatural being. For my argument that an infinite temporal series is metaphysically possible, but which shows how Cantorian set theory can apply to the real world without thereby generating counterintuitive absurdities, see my articles on the Kalam Cosmological Argument which are available on the Secular Web ([www.infidels.org/library/modern/arnold\\_guminski/index.shtml](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/arnold_guminski/index.shtml)).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Moreland & Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, at 184: "The term Naturalism has many different meanings, but a standard use of the term defines it as the view that the universe alone exists. Since most current forms of naturalism are physicalist in flavor, naturalism has come to mean that reality is exhausted by the spatiotemporal world of physical objects accessible in some way to the senses and embraced by our best scientific theories." (Cf. *ibid.*, at 142, 201, 229-230, 240, 267.) This is the naturalism that they have in mind in the course of their exposition of the moral and moral-plus argument for God's existence at *ibid.*, at 490-496, 499. Symptomatic of this tendency to conflate the various kinds of naturalism, with resulting polemical advantage, is provided by Moreland and Craig expressly asserting at *ibid.*, at 402, that "if a physicalist version of philosophical naturalism is true, then objective moral values do not exist," and submitting that if naturalism (without qualification) is true then objective moral values do not exist in the course of stating their axiological argument. Similarly Paul Copan writes in his essay "Moral Philosophy," at 162: "Physicalism seems to undergird naturalism, but physical properties are radically different from moral ones. And to be consistent it may be simpler for the naturalist to reject the existence of moral values rather than unnecessarily bloat his ontology."

<sup>25</sup> Cf., e.g., Moreland & Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, at 451: where the authors approvingly state: "[N]atural moral law consists in true moral principles grounded in the way things are and, in principle, knowable by all people without the aid of Scripture. Many Christian theists see natural moral law as part of God's general revelation, truths God has revealed in the creation itself"; and see also *ibid.*, at 410, where they refer to "the idea of natural moral law—the notion that there are true, universally binding moral principles knowable by all people and rooted in creation and the way things are made." See also J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), at 126-127: "[E]ven if one grants that there is some sort of *natural law or objective morality* which can be known by intuition—a view which seems to me to be true—one still cannot know much about morality from such cases of intuition, except broad, general ethical knowledge: 'pursue the good,' 'treat humans

with dignity,' truth has values,' and so forth. This is true as far as it goes, but it does not go very far.... This epistemological problem is solved in Christian theism by supplementing natural law or general revelation-broad ethical principles which exist and can be known by all men-with special revelation in the Bible. This is not to deny the reality of natural law." (Note omitted; emphasis added.). Although Craig and Moreland, in their *Philosophical Foundations*, also more frequently use the term "objective moral values" to refer to nonrelational, unanalyzable, irreducible moral properties of persons, human acts and states of mind (see *ibid.*, at 401-402), they do sometimes use the term synonymously with "natural moral law." See, e.g., *ibid.*, at 491: "To say that there are objective moral values is to say that something is right or wrong independent of whether anybody believes it to be"; and see Copan, "Moral Argument," at 150: "objective moral values do indeed exist: *kindness is a virtue and not a vice; torturing babies for fun is immoral; rape is morally reprehensible.*" Here Copan appears to use "objective moral values" to be synonymous with mind-independent moral truths. Cf. *ibid.*, at 150, 152. Indeed, he expressly describes objective moral values as "[t]his 'natural law,' which transcends human history and cultures, [and] is rooted in the very nature or character of a good God." "Because," as he explains, "we humans are uniquely made in the divine image, we are capable of *recognizing* or *discovering* moral principles; we do not *invent* them." *Ibid.*, at 149. However, Copan also generally uses "objective moral values" to mean nonrelational, irreducible moral properties of persons, human acts or states of mind.

<sup>26</sup> I endorse the following quotations from Moreland and Craig's *Philosophical Foundations*: "A judgment is moral only if it is accepted as a supremely authoritative overriding guide to conduct, attitudes and motives" (at 394); "[moral judgments] carry a great deal of authority, and they override considerations of mere etiquette, custom and law (at 395); "A judgment is moral only if it is a prescriptive imperative that recommends actions, attitudes and motives and not merely a factual description about actions, attitudes and motives" (*ibid.*); "A judgment is moral only if it is universalizable, that is, if it applies equally to all relevantly similar situations.... Moral judgments are not arbitrary judgments of personal preference" (*ibid.*); "A judgment is moral only if it makes reference to proper human flourishing, human dignity, the welfare of others, the prevention of harm and the provision of benefit.... [But] [a]nimals and the environment are, arguably, appropriate objects of moral concern in their own right and not merely because such concern is of benefit to human flourishing.... [M]uch of the point of morality is to preserve the dignity, welfare and richness of human life" (*ibid.*); "For the most part, morality is supremely authoritative, prescriptive, universalizable and makes reference to human dignity, welfare and flourishing" (at 396). Of course, the term "natural moral law" also encompasses derived precepts and norms determined by the application of the basic principles, precepts and norms to factually contingent matters.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Romans 2: 14-15.

<sup>28</sup> I borrow here from that great but now all-too-neglected American jurisprudentialist Francis Lieber who wrote in his *Manual of Political Ethics* [1838] (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 2d ed. 1874), at p. 68: "It appears to me that the only axiom necessary to establish the science of natural law is this: 'I exist as a human being, *therefore* I have a

right to exist as a human being." Lieber explained: "[E]very man, as man, has his own ethic worth and value; he is in this respect not only his own object, but in consequence of his reason and free will he can and ought to make himself the conscious object of his own activity; in other words, he shall consciously work out his own perfection; that is, the development of his own humanity. For this reason man has been called by the old philosophers *ens autoeles* (*ens*, being, *autoteles* [from self and end], a being that is consciously its own end and object, to distinguish him from other animals. This, as is evident, is again indispensably connected with man's individuality." (Ibid., at 67.)

<sup>29</sup> Moreland and Craig comment: "In fact, it is often easier to secure agreement among people about what a good person is and who fits that category than it is to reach consensus about the correct thing to do in a particular situation or about the correct set of moral rules." (*Philosophical Foundations*, at 456.) However, a prudent person, himself a person of good will, or trying to be or admiring those who are, will consult with those persons of good will whom he judges the most wise for their counsel as to what the natural moral law requires in a novel or difficult case—as would a prudent person consult with some attorney about a question of positive law. Here I should here acknowledge how much my thinking about metaethical views have been influenced over the years by William Kneale's fine article, "Objectivity in Morals," in *Philosophy* 25 (1950), reprinted in *Readings in Ethical Theory* (ed. Wilfrid Sellars & John Hospers) (New York: Appleton – Century – Crofts, Inc., 1952). At 681-697. Kneale cogently explains how moral law is similar to positive law, yet essentially different. According to him: "In the first place the moral law is supposed to be stricter than the law of the law—at least in a well-ordered state" (at 689); "Secondly, the moral law is thought to differ from the law of the law in having no sanctions ...[in] that the moral law is ...conceived as something to which sanctions are not essential" (at 689-690); "Thirdly, anyone who has attained a clear notion of the moral law thinks of it as a system of orders which he himself concurs in giving" (at 690); and "a fourth characteristic, more fundamental than all the others. The moral law is thought to be a set of commands which all reasonable men who possess the relevant information must concur in giving to themselves and their fellow men" (at 691). For Kneale, "the moral law cannot be objective in the same sense as a fact or law of natural science...[I]t cannot be independent of all minds [f]or the moral law is a system of orders, and it makes no sense to say that there might be orders although there were no minds" (at 694). Doubtless, the "reasonable men" of whom Kneale wrote are men of good will. So, for Kneale, the moral law is ontologically subjective but epistemologically objective. In this connection, it is worth noting that John L. Mackie himself (despite his conclusion that so-called objective moral values are ontologically subjective) has explained: "For there are certain kinds of value statements which undoubtedly can be true or false, even if, in the sense I intend, there are no objective values. Evaluations of many sorts are commonly made in regard to agreed and assumed standards....The subjectivist about values, then, is not denying that there can be objective evaluations relative to standards, and these are ...possible in the aesthetic and moral fields." *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penquin Books, 1997), at 25-26. The standard we are concerned about is that of the person of good will, who is the "morally good person" as defined by Dallas Willard in his "Naturalism's Incapacity to Capture Good Will" (*Philosophia Christi*, 4 (2002), at 21): "a person who is intent upon advancing the

various goods of human life with which they are effectively in contact, in a manner that respects their relative degrees of importance and the extent to which the actions of the person in question can actually promote the existence and maintenance of those goods."

<sup>30</sup> For a very helpful explanation of the concept of the "ideal human nature" (which, in my view, persons of good will would entertain if they adverted to the matter), see C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (Paterson NJ: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1959), at 55-60.

<sup>31</sup> For a particularly lucid discussion of the difference between the epistemologically and ontologically objective and the epistemologically and ontologically subjective, as well as intrinsic and observer-relative features of the world, see John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1995), at 7-13. To assert that x is an observer-relative feature of the world (such as George W. Bush is president of the United States or that Moscow is the capital of Russia) is no mean thing, denigrating from its reality. Similarly to assert that intentional homicide is presumptively prohibited by the natural moral law is just as much real, albeit an observer-relative feature of the world, as to assert that such homicide is presumptively prohibited by the positive law of some particular jurisdiction.

<sup>32</sup> See Copan "The Moral Argument," at 161: "[A]lthough naturalism may offer some bases for *holding moral beliefs*, it furnishes no basis for claiming they are *true*....[A] theistic world inspires confidence that we can *know* moral truths....Naturalistic morality may still be true, but there seems to be no way that we can confidently know it." See also *ibid.*, at 152, 159-160.

<sup>33</sup> Biblical quotations are from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Edition* (New York: Oxford University, 1977).

<sup>34</sup> *Philosophical Foundations*, at 15.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, at 85.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, at 594.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, at 450.

<sup>38</sup> "The Moral Argument," at 149.

<sup>39</sup> "Man's excellence consists in the fact that God made him to His own image by giving him an intellectual soul, which raises him above the beasts of the field" (Gen. Ad lit. vi, 12).

<sup>40</sup> "The image of God, in its principal signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman" (*Summa Theologiae* 1, 93, 4, 1); "Man is said to be after the image of God, not as regards his body, but as regards that whereby he excels

other animals. . . . Now man excels all animals by his reason and intelligence; hence it is according to his intelligence and reason, which are incorporeal, that man is said to be according to the image of God" (ibid., 1, 3, 1, 3).

<sup>41</sup> "[T]he image of God extends to everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch. 15, sec. 3.)

<sup>42</sup> "God has created us human beings *in his own image*: this centrally introduces our resembling God in being *persons*—that is, beings with *intellect* and *will*. Like God, we are the sort of beings who have beliefs and understanding: we have intellect. There is also will, however; we also resemble God in having affections (loves and hates), in forming aims and intentions, and in being able to act to accomplish these aims and intentions. Call this the *broad* image of God." (*Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), at 204.)

<sup>43</sup> *Pacem in Terris*, n. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., n. 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ch. 115(3).

<sup>46</sup> As St. Thomas Aquinas put it: "Besides the natural and the human law it was necessary for the directing of human conduct to have a Divine law. And this for four reasons. First, because it is by law that man is directed how to perform his proper acts in view of his last end. And indeed if man were ordained to no other end than that which is proportionate to his natural faculty, there would be no need for man to have any further direction of the part of his reason, besides the natural law and human law which is derived from it. But since man is ordained to an end of eternal happiness which is inproportionate to man's natural faculty, as stated above (5, 5), therefore it was necessary that, besides the natural and the human law, man should be directed to his end by a law given by God." (*Summa Theologiae*, 1-2, 91, 4.)

<sup>47</sup> True, Hebrews 11: 6 teaches: "And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." But it seems clear, from the context, that the Hebrews is speaking of supernatural faith—i.e., faith, as a freely accepted gift of God, in what has been supernaturally revealed precisely because it has been supernaturally revealed.

<sup>48</sup> Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is perhaps possible that such a universe is one in which God exercises not only his ordinary providence but also his special providence by discretely working through secondary causes to accomplish his will.

<sup>49</sup> Lucidly explicating a Thomistic viewpoint, Philip Flanagan in his fine study *Newman: Faith and the Believer* (Westminster MD: Newman Bookshop, 1946), at 190, explains: "The genesis of any natural law [whether descriptive or moral], whether of man or of any other creature, takes place spontaneously on the creation of the being it governs. . . . God

created man, and from the mere fact that he was made man he was subject to the natural moral law." And later, he remarks: "It is because man exists and is what he is, that the moral law is in force and has the form it has. And so the proximate source of the natural law is in man." (Ibid., at 192.) But, as Flanagan further explains, "[w]ithout God we cannot explain man's existence or his nature, and it is on them, and so on God, that the natural law depends." (Ibid.) An astute Catholic moral theologian, Walter McDonald, in his *The Principles of Moral Science* (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son, Ltd., 2d ed. 1910), dismisses the moral argument for God's existence. However, he acknowledges quite readily: "[M]oral relations are actualities, and, like other finite actualities whatsoever, must owe their existence to an efficient cause distinct from and prior to themselves. It is not, however, an argument distinct from the ordinary metaphysical proof; it is as if one should first contend that the solar system must have been cause, and then go on to argue that the system of Sirius or Aldebaran must have been caused similarly. Both arguments are valid, but they are not distinct." (Ibid., at 162.)

<sup>50</sup> Moreland and Craig are quite emphatic that in asserting that there are objective moral values and that humans have intrinsic dignity and value are to be understood as inherent, irreducible, unanalyzable, nonrelational moral properties which persons and human acts and mental states have. See *Philosophical Foundations*, at 401-402, 494-495, and cf. 526 where the authors, although speaking of intrinsic and extrinsic change, show they mean by "intrinsic" something which is nonrelational and "extrinsic" what is relational. Copan

essentially holds the same views about objective moral values and intrinsic human dignity and value. As Copan declares: "The instantiation of moral properties is internally related to (or bound up with) personhood, and if no persons existed, then no moral properties would be instantiated." "Moral Argument," at 157. Clearly, it must be the case that all three writers agree that the instantiation of moral properties, including objective moral values and the intrinsic dignity and value of humans, takes place in the ordinary course of nature.

<sup>51</sup> Although my foregoing discussion assumes *arguendo* that objective moral properties (as understood by Craig, Copan, and Moreland) exist, it is actually my opinion that we do not need to believe that they exist in order to have a sound metaethical theory of the natural moral law. But this does not entail that there are not epistemologically objective moral truths with a requisite ontological foundation based upon the facts about human nature. Each human, for example, has a dignity (i.e., deemed worthy of respect) imputed by him by virtue of the natural moral law because he is not to be treated as a mere instrumentality, being necessarily valued by persons of good will for his own sake because of his humanity.

<sup>52</sup> Copan, "Moral Argument," at 151; Craig, *Does God Exist?*, at 172.

<sup>53</sup> Moreland & Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, at 490-493, 530; Copan, "Atheistic Goodness Revisited," at 92-93.

<sup>54</sup> As one Christian writer astutely remarked: "But the recognition of God's existence, and of the fact that He alone can satisfy our craving for happiness, is not indispensable to a knowledge of the natural [moral] law. If it were, culpability in failing to recognize God's existence would never be possible." Flanagan, *Newman*, at 192. This is the case because the naturalist cannot be said to know that the natural moral law obtains after experiencing his properly basic belief to that effect as having been subjected to what he now holds to be irrefutable defeaters culminated to show that there can be no sufficient proximate foundation compatible with any version of naturalism.

<sup>55</sup> Incredibly, Moreland and Craig claim: "on classical theism God holds all persons morally accountable [in the hereafter] for their actions. Evil and wrong will be punished; righteousness will be vindicated." *Philosophical Foundations*, at 491. See also *ibid.*, at 493: "If life ends at the grave, it makes no difference whether one lives as a Stalin or a saint." This claim would make "sense" for a conservative metaphysical naturalist only if the so-called "classical theism" is defined to mean a theological system which includes not only assertions about theism but many other things besides. However, the contention that "on classical theism holds all persons morally accountable [in the hereafter] for their actions," if understood as a proposition in natural theology, is incompatible with God's perfect liberty, omnipotence, and inscrutability.

<sup>56</sup> Walter McDonald, *Principles of Moral Science*, at 162. Ultimately, the *internal* sanction for compliance with the natural moral law for the person of good will is provided by his conscience. Every person is in the first place accountable to himself for failing to conform to the natural moral law. External sanctions, more or less effective depending upon the circumstances, are provided by the collective intentionality of the community of persons of good will either through positive or customary law. If a person is not of good will, and neither wants to be nor admires those of are, then he will act as he wishes at best in his enlightened self-interest—unless God effectively communicates to him as to what are the rewards and punishments in this life and that hereafter. Unfortunately, there are also theists who are at heart not persons of much good will, and such persons are notorious for rationalizing their misconduct and distorting purportedly revealed doctrine to their own ends. Moreover, they are likely to choose those theological systems which provide those principles and doctrines by which they can best justify their attitudes and practices. Unfortunately, there are also many people who have a jaded and, sometimes, warped sense of what the natural moral law requires because virtually all their moral beliefs depend upon and have become affected by what they think has been supernaturally revealed. Such persons have become incapable of thinking for themselves on moral issues independently of supernatural revelation.

<sup>57</sup> Of course, what God supernaturally reveals is another matter. But our entire inquiry pertains to what can be known or reasonably believed solely by the light of our natural reason rather than by what is supernaturally revealed. The theologically conservative Christian should beware that the monster that may be hiding in the closet might well be a robust commitment to objective moral values and intrinsic dignity and value, so championed by Craig, Copan, and Moreland, because these entities may not sit very well with theologically conservative Christianity. But this is another polemical minefield

upon which I did not wish to presently tread. Those willing to do so might be interested in reading Raymond D. Bradley, "A Moral Argument for Atheism" (1999), [www.infidels.org/library/modern/raymond\\_bradley/moral.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/raymond_bradley/moral.html).

<sup>58</sup> Indeed, these writers say so in so many words. See, e.g., Moreland & Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*: "If God does not exist, then what is the foundation for moral values? More particularly, what is the basis for the value of human beings? If God does not exist, then it is difficult to see any reason to think that human beings are special or that their morality is objectively valid. Moreover, why think that we have any moral obligations to do anything?" (491); "Life is too short to jeopardize it by acting out of anything but pure self-interest. Sacrifice for another person is just stupid. Thus the absence of moral accountability from the philosophy of naturalism makes an ethic of compassion and self-sacrifice a hollow abstraction" (494), Copan, "Atheistic Goodness Revisited": "[A]s much as we laud self-sacrifice, naturalism renders irrational the laying down of one's life for a family member or friend. Why should I give up the few short years of existence that I have? How does the obligation of self-sacrifice make any sense at all in this scenario? Or, furthermore, *why* should I be moral when it conflicts with my self-interest" (93).

<sup>59</sup> There is likely much more to be said on behalf of the poor non-conservative metaphysical naturalist who conforms or tries to conform practically to the natural moral law despite his not having a sufficient theoretical foundation. Alas! I am afraid he shall have to fight his own battles. But let us charitably remember that there are many persons who in practice are persons of good will or earnestly try to be, however defective is their *official* theory during the time when they are philosophizing *ex cathedra*.